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Male preschool teacher students negotiating masculinities: an qualitative study with men who are studying to become preschool teachers

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Abstract

The overall interest is to understand how men who study preschool teaching negotiate masculinities. Earlier research shows how male teachers negotiate masculinities when being in and entering a predominantly feminine work area, such as early childhood education (see for example Simpson 2014, Brody 2015, Pirard, Schoenmaeckers & Camus 2015). In this article Connell's notion on hegemonic masculinity is reflected on in terms of negotiation. Semi-structured interviews with three main questions were conducted with 38 men attending the preschool teacher training programmes at three Swedish universities/university colleges. The result shows two main themes for negotiation that were called 'Becoming and being a 'breaker'' and 'Coping with sticking out'. These themes and their content are presented and discussed in the article.

Keywords: masculinities, male student, negotiation, preschool, early childhood education, gender

Introduction

The overall interest is to understand how men who study preschool teaching negotiate masculinities. Specifically, our aim is to analyse and explore how this negotiation is expressed through how the challenges male preschool teacher students express concerning their studies and their future profession. We will argue that these challenges relate to the conflict between how to display critical hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously being a professional preschool teacher. Further, we will argue that this conflict is demonstrated by the way these men express their position as a minority group and the expectations associated with that, while at the same time they 'break' certain male norms or notions how to be real men. These statements are discussed in this article.

Earlier research shows how male teachers negotiate masculinities when being in and entering a predominantly feminine work area, such as early childhood education (see for example Simpson, 2014, Brody, 2015, Pirard, Schoenmaeckers & Camus, 2015). This negotiation can be seen as needed due to gendered ideas of who is seen as suited for which kind of work, which calls for men to find strategies to negotiate masculinities, in order to both keep up with a normative locally constructed view on masculinity as well as find ways to be an individual and professional teacher in a work place where a majority are women.

Male students position as future male preschool teachers- and what implications their experiences of negotiating masculinities already as students - are of interest for coming efforts to increase the number of men in preschools. In Sweden, there has been a long tradition of striving for gender equality at different levels in society. As in many other countries, the main focus, understandably, has been on women's rights. Now a new type of awareness has emerged at policy level concerning the situation of men and there is growing interest in questions concerning masculinity (SOU 2014:6). Drudy et al. (2005; Drudy, 2008) and more recently Brody (2014) point out that the general pattern in the world as a whole is that less than 3 per cent of preschool teachers are male. Brody also states that the proportion of male workers is low even in countries such as Norway which has had some very explicit strategies for increasing male workers, but where only 10 per cent of the staff is male. In Sweden, 4 % of the staff is male.

The curriculum imposes a multifaceted gender equality assignment to preschools, in which one of the preschools' roles is to break down stereotypical gender notions regarding what girls and boys do, how they do things and when they do them. The Government mandate of the Swedish National Agency for Education (U2013/5044/S, U2012/7365/S) states that it is 'important even at preschool to show girls and boys that gender will not determine their choice of occupation'. This can be interpreted as an endeavour to also change gender roles regarding in what ways and by whom preschool teaching is done and former traditional gender-coded associations need to be critically analysed.

Literature review

Some aspects of being a preschool teacher have traditionally been 'naturally' linked to women and ideals of femininity, such as being friendly, caring, nice, sociable and close to children (Tallberg-Broman, 2011). The relationship of care and education is an essential part of a number of relevant gender debates that are linked to the call for male role models and the feminization of pre-schools. Underpinning the call for male role models is the influence of sex role theory. The feminine dominance within preschools, together with the moral panic about absent fathers, still serves to support the call for male role models of hegemonic masculinities for boys rather than girls (Connell, 2000, Whitehead, 2002). Care, female teachers, girls and certain spaces labelled as 'feminine' are tied together in this preschool discourse. Care is linked to the institution, female teachers, the building's architecture as well as the design, and informal situations such as meals that operate as a hidden curriculum. Researchers such as Renolds (2004) and Nordberg et al. (2010) have pointed out the importance of 'loosening the ties' between care, girls, girlishness, women and femininity, and create possibilities to also analyse care in relation to boys, boyishness, men and masculinity. Loosening this tie might also have implications on how jobs that are characterized as caring can open up for men too and how more men are beginning to see their future in such workplaces. However, as pointed out by Wernersson (2015), shifting from a traditional masculine occupation to a traditional feminine one, also means breaking the gender order 'downhill' with a potential loss of value, status, and salary as well as the risk of becoming

‘reduced’ in different ways. In this article, men who are studying to become preschool teachers in Sweden reflect on how they came to become preschool teachers and how they discuss their coming everyday life as preschool teachers. Their thoughts and ideas can be interpreted as ‘breaking’ against gender order and we will discuss their reflections on the costs for crossing that line. The students also break with ‘old’ ideas of masculinity since the results presented here show a more fluid and flexible way of presenting oneself as male.

A great deal of research has been conducted on the issue of men in early childhood education settings (cf. King 1998, Havung 2000, Barnard et al. 2000, Stroud, Smith, Ealy & Hurst 2000, Cooney & Bittner 2001; Nordberg, 2005; Cushman 2005; Sumsion 2005; Peeters 2007; Baagøe-Nilsen, 2008, Johnson 2011, Warin & Gannerud, 2014, Brownhill et al., 2015) but not as much has been done on men in preschool teacher training programmes. However, some international research has been done, although very little in a Swedish context (Havung, 2000, Stroud et al., 2000, O’Lynn, 2004, Nordberg, 2005, Hellman, 2010, Hedlin & Åberg 2013). Sumsion (2000a) shows that the men in her study wanted to make a difference by showing other ways of being male than the stereotypical male image. Sumsion also shows how they wanted to have personal development in their working life and they wanted to feel needed, at the same time as they reflected on being in a ‘feminine sphere’ – a place where they also needed to reflect on issues such as not being trusted and that parents and perhaps colleagues would consider their professional choice with suspicion.

Skelton (2009, 2012) shows in an analysis of current research that women and men have the same reasons for choosing teaching as a profession. Gender is not regarded by primary teachers as being of any particular significance to their careers, whilst minority ethnic and sexuality status are both regarded as having an impact (Skelton, 2009). Skelton draws the conclusion that policies on teacher recruitment drives need to focus less explicitly on gender and more on broader constructions and understandings of what it means to be a ‘primary teacher’. In a study about male preschool teachers in Sweden, Warin (2015) argues for student teachers to become ‘gender sensitive’. She sought to establish whether men working in early childhood education, were willing and able to counteract traditional gender patterns or if they tended to perform a hyper-masculine position.

Wernersson (2015) shows that the gender order is resistant to change and that men have remained as a small minority – 2–3 per cent of the ECE workforce in Sweden – despite several policy efforts. Wernersson points out that the question is in essence a *political* issue. She writes that ‘The question is how one should go about changing an established social pattern in order to make a better one. It is thus a deliberate and goal-directed construction of gender based on ideas of how things *are*, how they *ought to be* and what is *possible*. The contradictions in the arguments show that different ideas are at work simultaneously and also that there is no common understanding of either ‘facts’ or ‘goals’.

Sumsion's (2000a) study pointed out various aspects of how men who are studying to become preschool teachers see themselves and their own future professional context. Sumsion (2000a)

indicated that the men in her study had a desire to make a difference, by demonstrating that there are ways to be a man other than the stereotypical picture of one; they wanted to develop as individuals in their work as preschool teachers and wanted to feel they are needed. The subjects in her study also reflected on the fact that they find themselves in what is known as a feminine sphere, and they also needed to relate to not being trusted and to being viewed with suspicion because of their choice.

All in all, the knowledge provided by earlier research indicates that this is a complex issue. Men working in preschool is a complex issue because, from a perspective of gender theory, it is burdened with the question of who is most suitable to look after and care for children, both in general and in a professional context, and it also therefore filled with the question of how 'real' men are construed and how this concept is shaped in everyday life. Therefore it is of interest to search for ways of understanding the issue of male preschool teachers and combining that with a society that is highly marked by a gender equal ideal. In this article, it is done through the lens of male preschool teacher students who are working with children aged 1-6 years old in a Swedish context.

Theoretical basis

Early childhood education settings have traditionally been looked upon as an extension of home, and professionals in these settings need to show a 'natural' tendency for caring as high quality professionals. There has been little criticism of this way of understanding the frame of early childhood education settings, understood in a broad sense, and the prolonging of a caring parent (mother) in these settings has been considered in terms like 'natural' and 'given'. To show and professionally use these competencies as a man can challenge local ideas on what it is to 'be a real man'. It may also call for a man doing so to negotiate his masculine identity, since normative, hegemonic ideas of masculinities might not include showing such aspects.

According to Connell (2008) hegemonic masculinity is not to be seen as a general idea on masculinity or 'the most common masculinity', but rather an ideal seldom achieved by living individuals. However an image of 'the real man' can be looked at as a norm that both men and women relate to. Hegemonic masculinity can, as for instance Brody (2015) puts it, be seen as a paradigm that individuals adhere to at great cost. Connell (2000) describes that the common feature between all masculinities is the construction based on the differentiation of masculinities and femininities. Hence, the hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a negation of femininity, while men and masculinity formations performing it or is ascribed feminine signs, is marginalized. However, Connell (2008, also Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) also writes about the widely used notion of a hegemonic masculinity as problematic, i.e., she addresses the question of whether it is possible to contend or state that there is *one* type of normative masculinity or not. In this article masculinities is described in plural, since the idea of a binary structure of one femininity and one masculinity seem outdated in a post-structural understanding of gender where gender is 'produced through discourse, i.e. signs, labels, expressions' (Simpson, 2014). In order to deepen the understanding of masculine identities,

and the possibilities and obstacles that comes with such identities, it is of importance to look at hegemonic masculinity as an ideal, not as practice, but in relation to which individual men still might negotiate their masculinities (see for instance Brody, 2015).

According to Hearn et al. (2012) hegemonic masculinity has to be understood in relation to other hegemonic discourses in the society. In line with Connell as well as Hearn et al. (2012), we argue that gender equality produces local kinds of idealized masculinity, as in Swedish early childhood settings. The local ideas on masculinities create negotiation of masculinities differently, since power imbalances relating to gender are locally different (Connell, Hearn & Kimmel, 2005). In a Swedish context it might mean that since gender equality is a prioritized issue in society, also generally meaning that identities are not seen as stable or fixed according to sex and gender, the negotiation can be easier. 'Easier', not meaning easy, but more approved of.

The men in this study exhibit the same patterns and demonstrate what Connell points to – that a hegemonic masculinity is not always a relevant interpretive model, but rather that masculinity constructs are historically locally and temporally contextual.

Method

This study is a study with a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was found to be the most relevant research method in order to find out the male students' masculine negotiations – such as getting closer to thoughts and ideas about being male preschool students (Skinner, 2012). A semi-structured interview with three main questions was conducted with 38 men attending the preschool teacher training programmes at three universities/university colleges (from here on referred to as 'universities') in different parts of Sweden. Preschool teaching in Sweden means teaching and caring for children aged 1-6 year-olds.

The three universities where these men studied were located in larger cities. A bias for this study is that these men have indeed already chosen preschool teaching as a profession and therefore we believe that the results concerning male teachers in preschools would be different if men not involved in preschool teaching had been interviewed.

The three overarching research questions in this study were:

- How do male preschool students negotiate around masculinities?
- What patterns can be found and how are these patterns manifested?
- What implications might these patterns have for the efforts to increase the proportion of men working in preschools?

Procedure

We sought out all men studying to become preschool teachers at these universities and we contacted all the male students by mail or phone. We conducted semi-structured interviews with about half of the male students available. The reason for only conducting interviews with

half of the male students was because we could either not get in contact with a student or a student did not want to take part in the study.

The interviews were 30-60 minutes long and done at one occasion. The men were provided with our three main questions prior to the interviews in an e-mail. The questions the interviews revolved around were:

- What was your path into preschool teacher training?
- What is your perception of the programme?
- How do you see your future as a preschool teacher?

In addition, we asked supplementary and follow-up questions in order to either clarify or gain more detail about some of their reasoning. The men were aged between 25 and 38 years old at the time of the interviews, which were conducted in May and September 2014.

Analysis of the material

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts constitute the primary data. We have gone back to the recordings only if we have felt there was something unclear in the transcript.

We have carefully read through the interview transcripts several times in order to discover discursive patterns in the text. With 'discursive patterns' we mean overall patterns that show social and culturally related ways that the men in the study relate to or express view on or ways of reasoning around masculinities. These readings were conducted based on the aim of the study, with the idea of negotiation as a main filter to give the reading additional dimensions. We subsequently marked and coded the statements that were the same or similar and then gathered these statements into themes and shared patterns and themes that are presented below.

We found different patterns that were grouped in two main themes. These themes manifest in different ways how the student negotiates masculinities. Both of the main themes are accompanied by a specific context that stood out in the process of analysis as especially clear. The first theme is called 'Becoming and being a 'breaker'' which reflects around their process to *start* negotiating around traditional, hegemonic ideals around masculinity and within that theme how 'To have experience of working in children's education' has been of importance in that process. The second theme is named 'Coping with sticking out' which refers to how these men needs to constantly negotiate as an everyday practice while being preschool student and also as a professional teacher. Within the everyday negotiation we found a theme that was called 'The ever-present paedophilia dilemma' which takes into consideration how sexual aspects of masculinities were brought into their professional lives.

Ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council's (2011) discussion and guidelines concerning good research practices have been adhered to in this project. The group of interviewees consists of a small number of individuals that means there is a risk of an individual within the group being

identified. The basic principal when it comes to presenting these results has been for the interviewees to be and remain as anonymous as possible, which has been ensured by measures such as giving them all fake names.

The results do not state the exact number who responded, in terms of how many responded in a certain way, except when this number is very high and all appear to agree. 'Many have responded', 'Several argue', etc. are the terms used frequently in the text. This is an ethical consideration we have made in this study in order not to ascertain the exact number for certain statements because there are a limited number of interviewees.

Results

Becoming and being a 'breaker'

There appears to be a tendency for individuals who have made non-gender-stereotyped choices, often referred to as 'breakers' in the literature, to be somewhat older and to have 'broken off' from another career path (Cushman, 2010). This is consistent with the results of this study even if it is talked of as negotiating masculinities. The majority of the men had either had a completely different occupation or studied something completely different before starting the preschool teacher-training program. The occupations the men in this study had had were security guard, magician, personal assistant, sales clerk, truck driver, chemist and bank clerk. The reason for breaking off is described in partially different ways and could be anything from leaving their former home country to illness, but very often the interviewees described feeling a certain lack of meaning that made them reflect on their choice of career.

Below is an excerpt of what Markus, who worked as a truck driver, said:

Yeah, well, the thing is ... when I started driving trucks, I thought it was kind of fun, but I realized pretty soon that, it just came to me; the feeling came afterwards. No, I started feeling more and more that it wasn't for me and ... Well, I just kept thinking 'it'll probably get better somewhere down the line', but then I reached a turning point with this old guy I worked for. It didn't work. And then luckily, when I lost my job, I was offered this internship and it was such a contrast between the two, you know ... from the old guy and then this (laughs).

Markus described a feeling he had while working as a truck driver and also described in the interview how his boss was demanding and aggressive, which he found unpleasant. This feeling, together with being laid off and the internship, led to his decision to take up preschool teaching. A similar, yet different 'break' was described by Olof:

Olof: I could never imagine doing anything else, I guess you could say that it was my duty to go on in some way, that right then it felt like anything other than an engineering program was a step down.

Mia: Yes, exactly.

Olof: We had a really unique class because it was a hybrid programme, with half the class doing all science, the other half doing half science, half music so there were a load of musicians in the class. So yeah, they vanished, they had their own plans and what not. But those doing all science; there was a lot of talk about what we would do after, it was, how should I say this, computer nerds and brainy kids and all those groups, or whatever you want to call them.

Olof described the impossibility of choosing something other than what his high school programme focused on. He also stressed the significance of his peers in the choice he made and described how their choices also indirectly affected his choice. However, he said in the interview that the civil engineering program he then chose and completed was not something he actually would have chosen; instead, it was the sort of thing that was expected of him. Olof also described how his father had pushed him into choosing the engineering program in the same way as his siblings had done, and that the demands from home were high.

Reading the list of careers some of the men had had prior to studying to become preschool teachers also gives a list of male gender-coded careers. One possible interpretation could be that the break to go into preschool teacher training takes place from a fairly male gender-coded group of careers. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that, for some of the men we interviewed, the break was not just from the labour market; the majority of them also changed the focus of their studies from male gender-coded fields. Many of the men had been involved in studies of variants of engineering, finance, computing and law. It might have been their initial idea of what these fields involved that led to their decisions, but the study content then made them reflect on the error of their choice.

Tommy described a process, from having attended an economics program at upper secondary school, to getting into the preschool area through his mother. In this way, Tommy is also typical of what we see in this data, in that he did not choose the child and recreation programme at upper secondary school – a programme that is perhaps regarded as the most common for those who continue on to preschool teacher training. When it comes to the 38 men in this study, only a few of them attended this programme. Other programmes were significantly more common, but there is no discernible pattern in terms of the programmes attended by the others; it varies greatly. Nor had any of these men started their studies to become preschool teachers immediately after upper secondary school; instead they had done something else. Many also described how they took adult education classes to achieve the entry requirements.

As was the case with Tommy, several of the other men (but not all) described how women close to them had acted as a form of support in the change to or choice of the preschool teaching profession. Only a few of the men described their fathers as being supportive, and in some of those cases, the father was also a teacher. Brothers were also described as supportive, but no male friends are described as such. In addition, many of the men described their fathers as being indirectly opposed to their decision, and thus as someone they have distanced

themselves from. Tommy described how his father did not say anything direct, instead the Tommy says 'he is a bit like, 'it's up to you, do what you want'.

Tommy: I don't know, I just had a feeling that this (study economy; author's remark) is not what I want to do when I get older, when I am done studying. I have really thought about it: that I feel I want to work with people and that sort of thing. And then when I dropped out of that economics course, I got two jobs at the same time. One was as a financial assistant at the municipality where I lived and the other was as a substitute preschool teacher

Mia: What happened then, what comments did you receive, are there any that have stuck with you?

Tommy: Yes, especially from my grandparents on my father's side, they were, they still are, always on my back about this. ---. Yes, they are really involved, because I'm the oldest grandchild and they think I should be successful, I'm the one with the brains out of all their grandchildren, so to speak. So they are really critical of this, even though my grandmother is a preschool teacher. ---. But my grandfather is still very critical, he says that 'you earn so much more being an economist or an accountant or something like that.'

Mia: So it's down to money then.

Tommy: Exactly, and that's really all he's thinking=

Mia: What did your grandfather do when he was working?

Tommy: He was manager of some construction company, something big covering the whole of Sweden.

Mia: What does your father do then?

Tommy: He's in the same industry.

This can be interpreted as Tommy having distanced himself from the construction tradition in the family and from an expected (masculine) norm in the family through his choice.

In their own way, each break that the men in this study made all appeared to be different. However, they displayed a pattern of breaking with a very male-coded field to enter a female-coded field. Thus, none of the subjects in this data described a break from a less gender-coded field to the preschool field. However, some did describe thinking about the teaching profession first, but this is something indicated by previous research as well; teaching older pupils is viewed as less gender-stereotypical than teaching preschool (Francis & Skelton, 2001).

To have experience of working in children's education

Another factor that had influenced the interviewees to study preschool teaching, and dare to be breakers, was the opportunity they were given to either work or do an internship at a preschool. In general, this job or internship had been a powerful experience that the interviewees described emphatically. Tim described his experience as follows:

So then I moved to Norway and started working at a preschool as a substitute, then as a permanent substitute, and worked there for a year. And that was probably the most fun job I'd ever had ... and I was really well thought of there, I was the only man and really noticed that I had ... And ... well, when I finished that job, I cried like a baby, you know what I mean ... like this ((laughs)) ... and then I just felt that if I'm having this reaction to leaving – I've finished other jobs and cried with happiness, you know, but never like this – if I react like that to leaving this job, then that's what I should be doing, you know. So I decided to do it, when I finished travelling I would study to become a preschool teacher.

What Tim described here involved, in this case, going in as a substitute preschool teacher with rather undefined expectations and coming away with an experience and a direction for his future career.

This is how Oscar described his experience of working in preschool:

My mother worked at a preschool and as a nanny while I was growing up, but in recent years she's been working in a preschool. They needed a substitute there for two weeks or something, so she got me the job and I was a substitute for two weeks. And I thought it was a lot of fun. I don't know, maybe it was the perfect timing because I have just been working at a gas station and I thought that was, you know, it felt so meaningless. Then when you switch to something there, first of all, you are almost always met by happy people and you feel needed and feel that you are there for a reason.

The men described a positive feeling when they talked about their first contact with preschool. In some cases, they stated that this was also because they had never thought about that sort of job and that they had no great expectations of how it would suit them.

Patric described the significance of experiencing the learning and being able to share that joy in various ways with the children. Patric described his delight in being able to promote learning, and the delight of the child at discovering something new in their lives. Patric described a particular situation in which he found a way to teach a child, Felix, to pronounce the letter f.

So I sit down and ask him, 'but Felix, can you say Felix?' 'Schtelix.' 'Can you say coffee?' 'Coffee.' 'Say coffeelix.' 'Coffeeli-' and then I saw that it sunk in for him. And it's just like that, I realized that it doesn't matter, but when I in some way got the impression that, well, I get to devote a lot of time to teaching, every day at any given moment, if I take all the opportunities presented.

Patric found several aspects on which to reflect in this incident. Other than the experience of Felix learning, it was also a specific event to reflect on with regard to the content of the preschool teaching profession. Thanks to this event, he realized that he had adopted incorrect values and incorrect information in his view of the preschool teaching profession. Here, this is interpreted as a way for the interviewed men to say they want to work in preschool on the same premises as women do; they want to work there as educational, professional preschool teachers, not primarily as male preschool teachers.

Coping with sticking out

Some part of me likes being a bit different too, I think, so I want to do things that maybe not everyone else do, I want to be someone – even if you shouldn't think like that – who is noticed.

This is what Johan said about being a man working in preschool, and sticking out, a recurring theme in the interviews. Many said that being and becoming someone who sticks out is something that you have to cope with, be able to deal with and endure. Not everyone said this, but several referred to this as part of a process of becoming a male preschool teacher. It is pretty much impossible not to be visible as a man in a social institution that is largely staffed by women. It is a place where everyone remembers your name, when studying 'you have to be on your own with a bunch of chicks' and all the teachers on the programme remember you – including your bad sides. However, no one mentioned having to do better in their studies simply because they were 'breakers', except on the issue of paedophilia which we will come back to. This is otherwise a commonly occurring theme when it comes to female 'breakers' in male-dominated occupations – they need to be extremely good in order to be accepted and included. This does not appear to be the case for these men. Accordingly, this can be discussed in terms of them being able to use their male privileges, to use the words of Mills, Martino and Lingard (2004, p. 365).

One part of sticking out is in fact sticking out when looking for work. Many of the men noted how easy it would be for them to find work as 'everyone wants to have us' and from this perspective, sticking out is something positive, an opportunity.

Sticking out can also be accomplished by doing gender-related things that make them stick out as a different type of man. Johan discussed male norms and his view of how he could serve as a gender-equal role model for the children by sticking out in a different way to how men are usually seen.

Mia: Do you think about any- now, you were already on that subject, but specifically male norms, is there something specific about male norms that you think you will have the opportunity to go clearly against?

Johan: Sure, the male norm is really crude, you know, in that way, or has been, or still is=

Mia: And exercising power and putting people down etc.

Johan: Yeah, putting each other down, all the time, pouncing on weakness. Yeah, I think about that, well, a lot, it... I mean, just talking to a five-year-old about power, you know what I mean, it would be cool, I want to do that, for sure... But also to, what should I say, really ... try to call things into question, cause the kids often have, well, you know at the age of around four or so they kind of absorb it, from the outside or whatever, this is a girl, this is a guy, to... to call that into question, to set a thought process in motion in their heads, what is this, why is this like it is?

Being or becoming someone who sticks out did in fact involve seeing their own specificity and being prepared to use and reveal these skills. Several of the interviewees were also multilingual. These men highlighted how they wanted to use their language skills in their future careers as preschool teachers and one of them, after having worked for a few years, wanted to open a preschool specializing in languages with some of his classmates in order to raise the positive significance of being able to speak several languages.

The ever-present paedophilia dilemma

For men, one part of the process of becoming a preschool teacher appears to be dealing with the risk and threat of being viewed as a sexual offender/paedophile, with this being seen by the interviewees mostly as a barrier in the process. All of the interviewees described this in different ways, but each of them related to paedophilia. Every one of the interviewees brought the conversation round to this question when we have asked them to reflect on what it is like being a man in preschool. Some may have interpreted bringing up paedophilia as being a ‘correct answer to this question’, which was in no way my implicit intention.

Based on the interview responses, it is primarily the parents who are given the power to define these men as supposed paedophiles. But other staff members were also mentioned, although not to the same extent as parents. Oscar described a subtle emotional transfer, as brought up by many of the interviewees, specifically when discussing being a man in preschool.

The fact that this is a part of these men’s process of becoming preschool teachers shows how several ideas of masculinity are present at the same time, colliding and negotiated. The idea of paedophilia as closely connected to male sexuality that is seen as being both desirable and dangerous shows how sexuality can be seen as a major part of masculinity in preschools from the point of view of parents, who are the ones that these men saw as addressing them with suspicion. This goes somewhat against the basic idea of this article, i.e. that ideals connected to masculinity are changing. However, there is very little qualitative knowledge about the processes around paedophilia and the actual presence of parents’ suspicions in preschools and that is why I choose only to briefly analyse this.

The strategies the men described for dealing with the situations they ended up in, or when they had ideas and thoughts concerning a subtly strange treatment of them by a parent, included ignoring this treatment, being overly clear to the parents about their expertise/gaining the parents' trust, not being alone, particularly with girls, in the toilets or not

consoling or showing as much concern as they would like/are able to towards girls/children, or focusing their work on older children. Only very few of the men in this study had received clear support from their manager/internship supervisor in dealing with this issue. The majority had been left to deal with this alone and they did so by thinking about their own beliefs, or possibly by discussing it with the other men studying to become preschool teachers or happened to be close to them.

Conclusions

Sumsion (2000b) and Broady (2015) contends that men in preschools are constantly having to negotiate their 'otherness' on the basis of not really being a 'real man' in line with some form of idea of masculinity and at the same time shaping and negotiating a new form of masculinity in a profession as preschool teacher. If one looks at Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity, the ways masculinity is shaped by the men in this study can be seen as a hybrid of a hegemonic kind of masculinity that these men relate to, while at the same time they are shaping and negotiating other contents to masculinity, such as gender awareness and being caring.

Sumsion (2000b) also states that this negotiation is not solely conducted by the men themselves; it is also done by others in their contact with these men. Sticking out, the creation of 'otherness' and performing the same work as others in the preschool are issues that the men returned to in various ways throughout the interviews in this study. *They are looked upon as different but want to do the same as others.* Therein lies the challenge – allowing men, and all the other individuals in preschool, to be different, while still finding a way to organize work in preschools so that it is the same for all employees.

The themes that emerged from the interviews involved negotiation in different ways. What is particularly interesting about being a 'breaker' is that it often took place from a rather male-coded occupation/study focus to a very female-coded career focus. The break these men made was rather drastic and can possibly be compared to what Williams (1993) saw in her studies, in which men in the preschool teaching profession reinforced stereotypical masculine norms, but that these men were perhaps doing so *before* they chose their new occupation. The result that stands out in this study is that the men had some sort of experience of working with children before choosing to apply for the preschool teacher training programme which can be seen as a step in the process of negotiating against certain masculine ideals. It is possible to regard the experience the men had acquired/been given as a catalyst or springboard to a new decision, something that perhaps would not have been possible otherwise.

One focus was placed on seeing learning as something the interviewees stated was a big advantage of the profession. No one regarded seeing the differences between what women and men do as a specific opportunity, rather it was something to deal with, a pigeonhole that they risked being placed in. All regarded the paedophilia dilemma as something negative and a form of barrier, even though the term barrier was not used by the men. The discussion about 'sticking out', usually seen as an opportunity and something positive, was also discussed in

relation to the paedophilia-dilemma where they felt they became very visible in a negative kind of way.

It is possible to relate Connell's (2008) theories about hegemonic masculinity to the fact that the patterns displayed among these men can be regarded as another type of masculinity that is predominant. The negotiations the men conducted between these ideals, norms or masculinities – regardless of what you choose to call it – are one aspect of being a man and a preschool teaching student and prospective preschool teacher. There is a weak tendency in the data for the men who have the language to discuss masculinity norms and knowledge about masculinity analysis to have an easier time dealing with the negotiations and the process of being visible in all these senses.

The results of this study are consistent with international studies that have been conducted previously (cf. Cushman, 2010; Cameron, Moss, & Owen, 1999). Their findings indicate that men who study to become preschool teachers are somewhat older when they study, that they have work experience, they do different things in preschool than women, and that they want to be needed and experience personal development. However, what does not appear to be consistent with prior research is the need for the men to make themselves 'more manly' when the context can be considered female-coded. Cushman (2010) points out how an international context that involves a generally high level of knowledge about gender relationships and the role of gender can have a positive impact on how men see themselves and their role in preschool. The responses in one study of men on the teacher-training programme at Linköping University also indicate a gender-aware level of reflection about their role (Pernrud & Lykke, 2013). It is also at this juncture that we can discuss how much the discourse on new fathers, gender and gender equality will have a role to play in well-being at the individual, future preschool.

The first research questions have been answered presenting the two main themes through illustrations of interview citations presented in the results section. The final research question can be answered in many different ways. However, based on the results of this study, increasing the proportion of men working in preschools will require an increased number of internships for men in preschools, training about gender for those who distribute internships, continued dialogue and discussion about equality and gender in schools and society, and a clearer approach to the issue of paedophiles for all those who run schools. The last item on the list could provide a sense of security for men who work in preschools and a cognizance about not being left isolated on the day the issue is brought to the fore. What also appears to be important are efforts to change the view of the content of the preschool teaching profession, involving an elucidation and reinforcement of the educational aspect.

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